



INTERACT
WITH
LITERATURE

Sweet and Sour

A collection of stories for
pleasure and learning
by Antonella Mignani

V. Alcock, M. Allingham,
I. Asimov, B. Capes, R. Dahl,
W. W. Jacobs, A. Lurie,
K. Mansfield, R. Rendell,
S. Rushdie, Saki



Vicens Vives - Sweet and Sour
(Blackcat) - ISBN: 9788877545411

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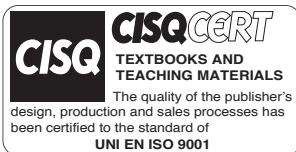
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Aims and Skills

Level:

- from intermediate to upper intermediate

General reading competence:

- selective
- semantic
- textual
- pragmatic-communicative

General aims:

- reading fluently and accurately
- understanding how meaning is conveyed through language and text organisation
- understanding the writer's intentions and attitudes
- judging the communicative value of a literary text
- assessing the text as a whole and formulating one's personal response to it

Specific aim:

- acquiring critical reading ability

Skills activated:

- predicting, anticipating, guessing
- skimming, scanning, detailed understanding
- summarising
- note-taking
- understanding stated and implied information
- making inferences
- recognising discourse indicators and the relations between the parts of a text
- understanding the importance of coherence and cohesion
- analysing and interpreting the text
- writing a commentary

*There is an internal landscape, a geography of the soul;
we search for its outlines all our lives.*

Josephine Hart, *Damage*

To S. – who makes the world a much better place to live in.

Phonetic symbols

Vowels

[ɪ]	<i>as in</i>	six
[i]	"	happy
[i:]	"	see
[e]	"	red
[æ]	"	hat
[ɑ:]	"	car
[ɒ]	"	dog
[ɔ:]	"	door
[ʊ]	"	put
[u:]	"	food
[ʌ]	"	cup
[ə]	"	about
[ɜ:]	"	girl

Diphthongs

[eɪ]	<i>as in</i>	made
[aɪ]	"	five
[aʊ]	"	house
[ɔɪ]	"	boy
[əʊ]	"	home
[ɪə]	"	beer
[eə]	"	hair
[ʊə]	"	poor

Consonants

[b]	<i>as in</i>	bed
[k]	"	cat
[tʃ]	"	church
[d]	"	day
[f]	"	foot
[g]	"	good
[dʒ]	"	page
[h]	"	how
[j]	"	yes
[l]	"	leg
[m]	"	mum
[n]	"	nine
[ŋ]	"	sing
[p]	"	pen
[r]	"	red
[s]	"	soon
[z]	"	zoo
[ʃ]	"	show
[ʒ]	"	measure
[t]	"	tea
[θ]	"	thin
[ð]	"	this
[v]	"	voice
[w]	"	wine

Abbreviations

- British English, BrE
- American English, AmE
- Colloquial, coll.

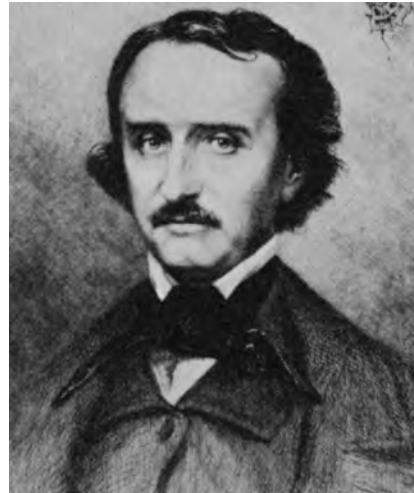
Introduction

The short story

Definition

Length is the distinguishing feature of the short story. The term ‘short story’ is normally applied to works of narrative fiction ranging in length from five hundred to fifteen thousand words. Anything longer than this is either a novella (a literary work in prose which ranges in length between a short story and a novel) or a novel. Many of the distinguishing features of the short story are in fact related to its brevity.

A short story is a condensed fictional prose narrative with a relatively small number of characters involved in a single action focused on a single conflict. Short stories are therefore often called ‘slice-of-life-stories’ and are likely to produce a ‘certain unique effect’ on the readers, as the American writer Edgar Allan Poe claimed.



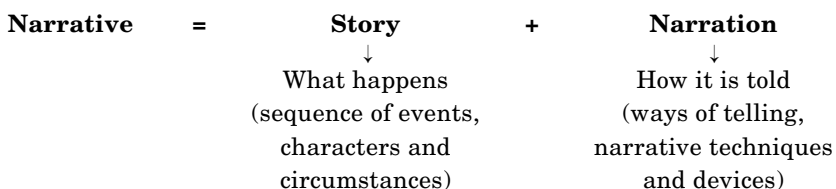
Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe (1894).

Characteristics

As far as structure is concerned, a short story is a **narrative**, that is, it consists of a series of events related by a narrator to a reader or a listener. In this basic definition, the short story is seen as the result of a process of communication in which a verbal message is transmitted by a sender (the author) to a receiver (the reader). The act of narration involves:

ADDRESSER (the author) → MESSAGE (the text) → ADDRESSEE (the reader)

A diagram of the act of narration is given below.



Remember that the relations between story and narration are of time and space. The most common type of relation is called ulterior narration, which means that the events happened before the act of narration, which is therefore mainly in the past tense. The distance between the events and their narration may vary considerably from text to text, from a few hours or days to several years.

All short stories have a beginning, an ending and a general purpose, that is, a point or message to be extracted from the text. They also have recurrent features:

a setting: the place and time where the events take place;

characters: the agents who perform the action;

events: the facts that drive forward the action and form the **storyline**. They are logically connected and related to one another chronologically or by cause and effect. The way they are arranged and presented by the narrator in a sequence is called the **plot**. Main events, those which introduce alternatives and require the characters to make choices, are called **kernel**s. Minor events, which expand or accompany the main ones, are called **catalysts**;

a closure: the 'ending' or resolution of the narrative, which may solve the problematic issues – in this case the ending is **closed** – or leave situations unresolved – in this case the ending is **open**;

a narrator: the 'voice' that tells the story. There are two basic types of narrator:

- the **'I-narrator'** who tells the story using the first person and is a character 'inside' the world of the story
- the **'they-narrator'**, who uses the third person and remains 'outside' the fictional world.

The narrator must not be confused with the author, who is a real person. The narrator, often called the story-teller or addresser, is purely fictional. An author may therefore invent narrators who are unusual or fantastic, such as speaking animals, robots, computers or dead people;

narrative modes: the way the story is told. There are four basic narrative techniques, which may be used in combination, depending on whether the narrator focuses on one or more particular aspects of the story:

- report: the narration of events by the narrator
- description: the physical and/or psychological description of characters and places
- comment: the narrator's interpretation of characters and events
- speech: the characters' dialogues, monologues and interior monologues;

a listener/reader: the listener/reader is known as the 'addressee', the person to whom the narrator tells the story. The addressee may be fully personified or not, that is, the narrator may address his/her story to a well-defined person such as a character in the story itself, or may tell it to an impersonal unspecified audience.

The Horror Story



The Marble Hands

by Bernard Capes

**Vicens Vives - Sweet and Sour
(Blackcat) - ISBN: 9788877545411**

Bernard Edward Joseph Capes was born in 1854 and died in 1918. He is considered one of the best 19th-century British writers of ghost and horror stories. He published several collections of stories during his lifetime, of which *The Black Reaper: Tales of Terror* is certainly the most famous.

The Marble Hands

Part 1

While listening, pay attention to:

- 1 where the characters are and what they are doing;
- 2 what one character asks the other to do;
- 3 what unusual experience this character goes through;
- 4 how the other reacts to it.

W

e left our bicycles by the little lych-gate ¹ and entered the old churchyard. Heriot

5 had told me frankly that he did not want to come; but at the last moment, sentiment or curiosity prevailing with him, he had changed his mind. I knew indefinitely that there was something
10 disagreeable to him in the place's associations, though he had always referred with affection to the relative with whom he had stayed here as a boy. Perhaps she lay under one of these
15 greening stones.

We walked round the church, with its squat, shingled spire. ² It was utterly ³ peaceful, here on the brow ⁴ of the little town where the flowering
20 fields began. The bones of the hill were the bones of the dead, and its flesh was grass. Suddenly Heriot stopped me. We were standing then to the northwest of the chancel, ⁵ and a gloom of motionless trees overshadowed us.



Churchyard of a Monastery with a View of the Watzmann (1835) by A. W. Ahlborn. *Staatliche Schlösser und Gärten, Berlin.*

1 **lych-gate** : gateway to a churchyard covered by a roof, to protect coffins from the rain before a funeral.

2 **squat, shingled spire** : thick, short conical structure on top of the church tower, covered with rectangular wooden tiles.

3 **utterly** : absolutely.

4 **brow** [brau] : (here) the top of a hill.

5 **chancel** : part of a church where the priests and choir sit, which contains the altar.

'I wish you'd just look in there a moment,' he said, 'and come back and tell me what you see.'

He was pointing towards a little bay¹ made by the low boundary² wall, the green floor of which was hidden from our view by the thick branches and a couple of interposing tombs, huge, coffer-shaped,³ and shut within rails. His voice sounded odd; there was a 'plunging'⁴ look in his eyes, to use a gambler's⁵ phrase. I stared at him a moment, followed the direction of his hand; then, without a word, stooped⁶ under the heavy-brushing boughs, passed round the great tombs, and came upon a solitary grave.

It lay there quite alone in the hidden bay – a strange thing, fantastic and gruesome.⁷ There was no headstone, but a bevelled⁸ marble curb,⁹ without name or epitaph, enclosed a gravelled¹⁰ space from which projected two hands. They were of white marble, very faintly touched with green, and conveyed in that still, lonely spot a most curious sense of reality, as if actually thrust up,¹¹ deathly and alluring,¹² from the grave beneath. The impression grew upon me as I looked, until I could have thought they moved stealthily,¹³ consciously, turning in the soil as if to greet me. It was absurd, but – I turned and went rather hastily back to Heriot.

'All right. I see they are there still,' he said; and that was all. Without another word we left the place and, remounting, continued our way.

Check your understanding

- 1 What relation is there between the two characters?
- 2 What do you learn about them?
- 3 Which element of the story (people, place or events) has been described in detail so far? Can you guess why?
- 4 How do you think the story will develop?

1 **bay** : (here) small enclosed area.

2 **boundary** : marking the limits of the enclosed area.

3 **coffer-shaped** : in the shape of a box.

4 **plunging** : (here) acute and penetrating, as if looking through someone.

5 **gambler** : person who plays a game for money or property.

6 **stooped** : bent the body forward and downward while simultaneously bending the knees.

7 **gruesome** [gru:səm] : horrible and disgusting.

8 **bevelled** : with rounded corners.

9 **curb** [kɜ:'b] : enclosed frame.

10 **gravelled** : covered with very small stones.

11 **thrust up** : pushed up.

12 **alluring** : strangely fascinating.

13 **stealthily** : slowly and deliberately.

The Marble Hands

Part 2

While listening, pay attention to:

- 1 what the place reminds Heriot of;
- 2 which aspects of the woman's personality are particularly highlighted;
- 3 Heriot's final impressions about the experience he has just narrated.

Miles from the spot, lying on a sunny downside, with the sheep about us in
5 hundreds cropping the hot grass, he told me the story:

'She and her husband were living in the town at the time of my first visit there, when I was a child
10 of seven. They were known to Aunt Caddie, who disliked the woman. I did not dislike her at all, because, when we met, she made a favourite of me. She was a little pretty thing,
15 frivolous and shallow;¹ but truly, I know now, with an abominable side to her.

'She was inordinately vain² of her hands; and indeed they were
20 the loveliest things, softer and shapelier³ than a child's. She used to have them photographed, in fifty different positions; and once they were exquisitely done in marble by a sculptor, a friend of hers. Yes, those were the ones you saw. But they were cruel little hands, for all their beauty. There was something wicked⁴ and unclean about the way in which she regarded them.

25 'She died while I was there, and she was commemorated by her own



*La Bella Mano (1875) by D. G. Rossetti.
Delaware Art Museum.*

1 **shallow** : superficial.

2 **vain** : proud.

3 **shapelier** : better shaped and proportioned.

4 **wicked** : evil.

explicit desire after the fashion¹ you saw. The marble hands were to be her sole epitaph, more eloquent than letters. They should preserve her name and the tradition of her most exquisite feature to remoter ages than any crumbling inscription could reach. And so it was done.

'That fancy was not popular with the parishioners,² but it gave me no childish qualms.³ The hands were really beautifully modelled on the originals, and the originals had often caressed me. I was never afraid to go and look at them, sprouting⁴ like white celery⁵ from the ground. 30

'I left, and two years later was visiting Aunt Caddie a second time. In the course of conversation I learned that the husband of the woman had married again – a lady belonging to the place – and that the hands, only quite recently, had been removed. The new wife had objected to them – for some reason perhaps not difficult to understand – and they had been uprooted⁶ by the husband's order. 35

'I think I was a little sorry – the hands had always seemed somehow personal to me – and, on the first occasion that offered, I slipped away by myself to see how the grave looked without them. It was a close,⁷ lowering day, I remember, and the churchyard was very still. Directly, stooping under the branches, I saw the spot. I understood that Aunt Caddie had spoken prematurely. The hands had not been removed so far, but were extended in their old place and attitude, looking as if held out to welcome me. I was glad; and I ran and knelt,⁸ and put my own hands down to touch them. They were soft and cold like dead meat, and they closed caressingly about mine, as if inviting me to pull – to pull. 40 45

'I don't know what happened afterwards. Perhaps I had been sickening all the time for the fever which overtook me. There was a period of horror, and blankness – of crawling, worm-threaded immurements⁹ and heaving¹⁰ bones – and then at last the blessed daylight.' 50

Heriot stopped, and sat plucking at the crisp pasture.

- 1 **after the fashion** : (here) in the way.
- 2 **parishioners** : inhabitants of a parish, the area around a church for which the priest is responsible.
- 3 **qualms** [kwa:ms] : sudden disturbing emotions or feelings of uneasiness, doubt or fear.
- 4 **sprouting** : (here) coming out of the ground.

- 5 **celery** : vegetable of the carrot family with a white thick stem.
- 6 **uprooted** : (here) pulled out of the ground.
- 7 **close** : (here) uncomfortably humid.
- 8 **knelt** [nelt] : bent the knees and rested on them.
- 9 **worm-threaded immurements** : small dark prisons populated by crawling insects, like worms.
- 10 **heaving** : (here) moving.

Check your competence

- 1 Go through the text and underline all the words and expressions that convey horror and a sense of wonder.

Key concept: focalisation

The term **focalisation** defines the spatial and temporal relationship between *who* experiences the facts narrated (the **focaliser**) and *what* is experienced (the **focalised**). This relationship can remain stable and homogeneous throughout the text or shift according to what a character experiences and how this is experienced in the various sections of the text. In this case, we talk about **multiple focalisation**.

Focalisation can be *external* or *internal* to the story. The grid below sums up the various modes of narration.

External focaliser (EF)	An external voice functions both as narrator and focaliser of the events: the viewpoint from which everything is seen is not identifiable with any of the characters'. The narration is in the third person.
Character focaliser – third person (CFE)	The narrating voice is external to the story, but the focaliser is personified and internal, that is, events are seen from his/her viewpoint. The narration is in the third person, but the character focaliser (or centre of consciousness) can be identified through the use of <i>verbs of experiencing</i> that work as language markers, such as <i>feel, think, wonder, smell, believe</i> etc.
Character focaliser – first person (CFI)	The narrator and the focaliser coincide in one character from the story. Narration is in the first person and focalisation is internal to the fictional world.

In some stories, there may be two *levels of narration* or even more. A character in the story (whose actions are the object of narration) may start narrating another story, which is called **inner narrative**. This device is defined as **narrative within narrative** and can lead to a virtually infinite number of narrative levels.

Sometimes a character starts telling a story about something that happened before the main one. The *temporal scheme* of the main story is therefore dislocated, as there is a jump backwards into a more distant past. This device is called **flashback** or **retrospective narration** and serves a variety of purposes, such as giving information about a character's personality, revealing hidden events, solving a mystery, etc.

The Marble Hands

Check your competence

- 2 What aspects of 'The Marble Hands' make it similar to other horror stories you have read? Is it a traditional horror story in your opinion? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 Is it successful as a horror story or not? Give reasons.
- 4 As you have probably realised, this story develops on two narrative levels. Complete the table below to distinguish between them.

	Main narrative	Narrative within narrative
Setting		
Characters		
Events: kernels (main events) catalysts (minor events)	<i>Heriot's request</i>	
Closure	<i>closed, as the young man gets an explanation both for his strange feelings in front of the grave and for his friend's behaviour</i>	<i>open, because...</i>
Narrator		
Focalisation		<i>internal, because...</i>

Learning to learn: summarising

Whenever you have to report on a story you have read, you usually begin with a summary of its contents. An effective summary has the following characteristics:

- it is compact, that is, it is a shortened version of the original text which only contains essential information. Its length is usually one third of the original text;
- it is cohesive and coherent, that is, the relations between each part of the narrative are rendered linguistically through the appropriate use of link words, verb tenses, prepositions of time and space, personal pronouns etc., so that the summary is clearly understandable even by those who have not read the original text. In other words, the events must be organised in chronological or strictly logical order;
- it may be either in the present tense or in the past tense.